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FOUNDATION TRUTHS OF AMERICAN MISSIONS

An Address

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DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS

AT

NEW HAVEN, CONN., OCTOBER 14, 1897

BY

RICHARD SALTER STORRS, D.D., LL.D.

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FOUNDATION TRUTHS OF AMERICAN MISSIONS.

ADDRESS OF

REV. DR. R. S. STORRS.

Mr. President, Mr. Vice-President, Members of the Board, Christian Friends: — My heart was very full when I stood, ten years ago this evening, at this same hour, on the platform of the American Board at its meeting in Springfield, and said that I would take into careful and prayerful consideration the action of the Board in electing me to be its President, in spite of my reluctance and against my protest. My heart is very full to-night, as I stand at the end of these years, and look into the faces of the members of the Board and of this great congregation. Brethren and friends, you have done me honor overmuch! I have tried to be faithful and patient, kind in feeling and fair in action toward every member of the Board, and I have tried to do faithfully, day by day, what it came to me to do, on behalf of its interests; and that is all that I can claim. Whatever of success has attended the counsels and the work of the Board while I have held the office of President is due to the Divine Master, and not to me; to the Divine Spirit, and not to any counsel or judgment of my own. But as I look back upon these years, which in some respects have certainly been eventful years, it is with profound gratitude to God, and with profound gratitude to you. I rejoice to remember that my relations in all this time with all the officers of the Board, and with its committees, have been most affectionate and confidential; that we have considered the matters presented to us in a temper of perfect impartiality, though with the

most earnest desire to find and to do the best thing. I rejoice to remember that my relations with my dear friend and brother, the Vice-President, have become only closer and more intimate as the years have gone on; that our minds have been in perfect accord on all principal questions which have arisen, that our hearts have beat in perfect sympathy in all the action which we have been called to take, and that they have only come closer and closer together as we have conferred and acted with each other. I rejoice to look back upon these years of uninterrupted harmony and fellowship, and I pray that in the world to come his mansion and mine may not be far apart!

It is a great relief to me to stand before you to-night without the responsibilities of the presidency upon me, without the solicitudes and the forthcoming duties which I have hitherto had to face when, during these last ten years, I have stood face to face with an assembly like this, on such an occasion. I should have been most heartily glad to reassume these duties and these solicitudes, if such had been your wish, if I felt that I had strength and vigor for the work, strength and vigor equal to those which I had five or eight years ago; but it is a joy to me that you have found another, my dear and honored friend and brother for many years, who will take up this work and carry it forward, in the spirit, as he has suggested, of loyalty to the traditions of this American Board and with an earnestness and a strength which I now certainly could not give to the same work. So I rejoice to be here this evening, and to say what I have to say.

More than fifty years ago, when I was a young pastor in Brooklyn, I was invited to join and did join a comparatively small society of fifteen or twenty clergymen, associated in that city under the name, if I remember aright, of the Clerical Union. It was a very pleasant society. I enjoyed the meetings very much, though there were not more than eight or ten usually present at them. The president for the first year of my membership was my honored friend, Dr. Maurice W. Dwight, a relative of the distinguished President of Yale University, who was then pastor of the First Dutch Church in Brooklyn, and who had been kind enough

to take part in the services of my installation. At the end of the year he retired, according to the rule, and Dr. Cox was elected in his place. I do not think there were more than seven or eight of the members present when Dr. Cox arose — I can almost see him now in his stately dignity, in his splendid aspect, with the nimbus of white hair around his head — and said, lifting himself, according to his custom, as he said it, "I wish, before pronouncing my inaugural address, to listen to the exaugural discourse of Dr. Dwight." [Laughter.] The word was a new one to me at that time. Perhaps it seemed larger and more resonant than it would have done if there had been a hundred people there; but for eight or ten persons it seemed rather a waste of articulation. [Laughter.] However, I have always remembered it; and what I say this evening is to be regarded as what Dr. Cox would have styled my "exaugural address."

Dear brethren and friends, I have certainly no fresh and large philosophy of missions to present. I have simply certain cardinal convictions, which were in my mind when I stood on the platform at Springfield, and when afterward I accepted the office to which your kind confidence had called me, which have been more and more vitally imbedded in my mind from that hour to this, and by which all my thought and action concerning foreign missions have been moulded and sustained; and these I shall be glad to recall to you, in a few rapid words, not as anything new or anything startling, but as giving incentive, I think, and motive and the law of action, to those in this country who are interested in foreign missions.

The first of them is that simple yet ever stupendous conviction that God has a plan in the history of the world, has a purpose for mankind; the purpose to bring mankind into subjection, in all its parts, in all its reach, to the Divine law of righteousness and truth, to endow mankind with the treasures of Divine wisdom and grace. It seems to me impossible for any intelligent and reverent thinker to doubt concerning this. Of course the Bible is full of it from end to end. It speaks in every song and every story. It interprets narrative and history. It gives the criterion

of judgment for the character and the career of the men whom the Bible presents. According as they have fallen in with this Divine plan, and have furthered it by their endeavors and by their life, they are noble; according as they have opposed it, or withdrawn from coöperation with it, they are mean and despised. It is in all the ritual, in all the offices of the ancient dispensation. It is in all the prophecies, pointing on continually to the more and more glowing skies from which Christ is to come in the advent, and into which he is afterward to arise, conqueror of death. It is this vital, undecaying idea of the Divine purpose to bring mankind to the knowledge and the holiness of God, which is the vital substance of the Scripture; which prepares us for the advent and for the miracle, for the Divine instruction and for the Cross itself, and then for the illustrious and triumphant ascension which follows the Cross. It is this which makes Pentecost divinely natural, if we may say so, and prophetic of all that is to come after in the dispensation of the Spirit. It is this which reverberates in the great arguments of the Epistles, and which comes out, as in ruby and jasper and amethyst and chrysolite, in the glorious imagery of the Apocalypse. That the armies arrayed in white are to subdue the inveterate and fierce and bloody evils of the world, that is the burden of that closing book. That is the burden really, from first to last, of all the Scripture; and no man can read that Scripture carefully and thoroughly without having this deeply and permanently impressed upon his mind. Whatever particular criticisms may be made concerning writings or portions of writings in the Scriptures, as to their authority, as to their proper place in the sacred canon, as to the authorship of them, as to the time at which they were written, these criticisms or critical inquiries no more touch this substance of the Scripture than a minute botanical analysis touches the splendor of gardens or the grandeur of forests, or than the deep-sea soundings efface the blue from the surface of the ocean, or stay the swing of its tremendous tides. [Applause.]

But even aside from the Scripture it does seem to me impossible for any intelligent reader of the manifold consenting records of

the past to doubt that God has this plan in human history, and is steadily carrying it forward. From the earlier and the later Hebrew annals, from the histories of Assyria and Egypt and Greece and Rome, steadily we trace this plan unfolding; unfolding through the fire and blood of the Middle Ages; unfolding in the discovery of this continent at a time when, after it had been for hundreds of years plucked back from the knowledge of Europe, it was brought to light, just when the movable type was in the hands of man and the Christian Reformation was drawing near. Of course there have been setbacks, apparently, in this history of the progress of the plan of God concerning mankind, and skeptics make a great deal of those; but they are only natural. This is a prodigious and unreturning campaign; it is not a series of skirmishes unrelated to each other, however brilliant or however disastrous; and the evil which men see is only connected as an occasion with the vaster development of the Kingdom of God in the world. President Eaton, I think it was, the other day spoke of the streets of New York. I don't wonder that he did. [Laughter.]

As I rode over them on Tuesday, coming to the train, seeing the streets torn up, the water pipes burst, large areas flooded with the water, and the air filled with the intolerable gases, I thought that any one passing through New York for the first time might naturally feel that the rocky backbone of the city was being pierced and crushed, and the entire city was to sink into the abyss; but it is all for an ampler development, for an ampler equipment, that men may ride, and women, more rapidly and safely over those very streets, and that the future population of the city may have a finer endowment of opportunity and privilege than the present has. Men say sometimes that war comes in to interrupt the progress of God's Kingdom. Sometimes it does. A war of revenge is always demoralizing; a war of ambition is equally so; a war of self-defense, for the welfare and honor of a country, is not. I see, walking these streets of New Haven, the blood-red crimson on the foliage, as well as the shining gold; and neither is more indicative of decay than the other,

while both are simply prophetic of that verdurous spring which is by and by to come, clothing the lawns with beauty and the trees with the wealth of another year's foliage. So war is sometimes the instrument of God for the furtherance of his Kingdom in the world; and we are not to complain, certainly not to hesitate, certainly not to despond, when convulsions appear among the nations which seem strange in connection with this mighty purpose of the Most High. He is working on to his result; and whensoever the conviction of that, the vital and energetic apprehension of that, enters into the mind of the Church, into your minds and mine, then the enthusiasm for missions is rekindled in us, then we feel the magnificence of the privilege of working with God, of keeping step with Omnipotence in the march toward the future; then the old enthusiasm, from the time of early martyrdoms, from the time of the early missions, will be reënthroned in our hearts, and we shall see and feel the infinite privilege of men, above the privilege of angels, of working on the earth which Christ consecrated with his blood, for the glory of the Kingdom of that same Christ coming in his power. [Applause.]

And then the second conviction, radical in my mind for all these years, and now, is that the instrument by which this work is to be accomplished is the old Gospel, the gospel of life and salvation, the gospel of truth and invitation and promise, and of tremendous forewarning. You have seen, perhaps — I am sure many of you have — a very suggestive, striking, profound essay, published not long since in one of the magazines, from the pen of Captain Mahan. I think that is his title — "Captain Mahan." If thought-power and the power of lucid and energetic expression were the criteria of rank in the navy, he would be high Admiral. In this article he speaks of the general outward impulse among all the greater nations except our own, shown in their colonizations, shown in their efforts to gain territorial dominion in other lands; and he speaks of the coming together of the Orient and the Occident on the basis of common ideas of material advantage, without the sympathy, the corresponding sympathy, in spiritual ideas. And here he finds a danger — a

danger menacing our civilization; for, as he says emphatically, the civilization of modern Europe has grown up under the shadow of the Cross, and everything that is best in it still breathes the spirit of the Crucified; and there is peril in bringing together the East and the West on the basis of common material advantage, without this correspondence in spiritual ideas. Then he adds, justly and profoundly, that if this correspondence in spiritual ideas is to be attained it must be not by a process of growth, but by a process of conversion. You may remember in one of the letters of Matthew Arnold, written, I think, to Sir Duff Green (I am not sure), he speaks of the fact that the basis of things in Europe generally, and especially in England, has been for ever so long a belief in supernatural Christianity. That belief, he says, is certainly going; but he has no other basis whatever to present for the coming civilization. That basis of belief in supernatural Christianity was around him, was beneath him, was in the air he breathed, was in the faces and hearts of the friends he met, when he wrote those words; and if it be true, as he also said, that the transformation of the individual is the indispensable condition of the transformation of the community, of the nation or of the race, then there was no power in the England of that day, as there is none in the England of this day, to take the place of supernatural Christianity in working out that transformation.

With its stupendous and unparalleled truths, with its transcendent facts, with its invitations and promises that pass beyond the sweep of stars, with its gracious manifestation of God in tenderness as well as might — the tenderness of his welcoming smile, as well as the might of his stupendous miracle — in all this discovery of the world supernatural with which, by the very constitution of our being, we are allied, with the openings of the future, wherein destinies are to differ according to character, Christianity, the supernatural, reaches the individual heart to grasp it and to transform it, and reaches through that the circles which are affected by it, that it may transform at last the world. And there is no other power — none known to history, none conceivable by man —

that can take the place of this old Gospel, which the earliest disciples heard, received, and preached, which has been transmitted unto us, which our fathers loved and honored, in which was the impulse to this great missionary organization, and which is in the hands of the missionaries sent out by it to carry to all the darkened world. My dear friends, let this conviction root itself deeply in our hearts, as a vital, determinate conviction, which nothing can shake, that the power to transform the world is in the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ! [Applause.]

And then the third conviction is this: — that it is given to the English-speaking peoples of the world, and in a certain preëminent sense to the American people, to proclaim this gospel of righteousness and love, and of spiritual transformation, to the peoples of the earth. Every time this thought has come before me it has grasped me with a more prodigious power: this nation, the great minister of God for doing this, His transcendent work, in these tremendous times! It is shown to be so by its very geographical position. Poised on the crest of the globe, with the two great oceans of the world on either hand, with its 13,000 miles of ocean coast-line inviting commerce from abroad, stimulating commerce in its exit; with its prodigious wealth, so rapidly accumulating from the mine, from the prairie, from the meadow, from the orchard, from the orange grove, from the sugar plantation, from the wheat field, and the cornfield, and the cotton field, from the silver and the gold in the mines, from the great deposits of coal and iron and copper, from the great riches scattered over the surface, where men may scoop up fortunes in a forenoon, this nation, becoming rapidly one of the wealthiest of the world, perhaps the very wealthiest at this hour, is placed here, in this extraordinary geographical position, that it may send out its commerce, as it does, around the earth, searching every land with the enterprises of that commerce, carrying American manufactures into China and Japan and India and the islands of the sea, all over the earth. Then think of its composite population, allying it with all peoples of the world! 16,000,000 of immigrants in seventy years! Let that idea be fully grasped — each

of these persons and households with relations running back to the different and distant lands from which they have come. Think of this nation as recognized in all the earth foremost in demanding and promoting popular liberty and enterprise, in education, in government and politics, in social life, and in all the departments of enterprise. Think of it as having a past strangely significant behind it, as well as this out-reaching present around it now! the only principal nation in the world, remember, that was founded as a missionary nation, that has kept the temper of the missionary spirit from the beginning until now. The fathers came to this continent, then a wilderness, as Governor Bradford said, in the great hope, in the intense zeal, by coming here to extend the Kingdom of Christ in these remote ends of the earth; and you remember the old seal of the Massachusetts colony, with the figure of the Indian blazoned on it, and for the legend overhead, the Macedonian cry, "Come over and help us!" That was the spirit in which the nation began; and in the same spirit its development has been carried on ever since, in the foundation of schools and churches, of benevolent institutions of whatever sort. This great university, which gives celebrity to this noble and beautiful city, was founded to teach men to preach the gospel, to preach a sound, energetic theology to all who would hear; and it has been developed, expanded, built up to its present magnificent proportions, with that same idea behind it, and the same idea within it; as Harvard College was founded in the same temper, as Williams and Amherst and Bowdoin and Dartmouth have been founded for the same purpose, to train men to preach the gospel. That has been the idea of this nation from the outset on; and it was that conviction in the minds of the Christian people of this country — that the nation was designed of God to do a great work for him in the furtherance of his Kingdom in the earth — which was an immense power in our Civil War, sustaining the spirit of the people in the midst of disaster and defeat, carrying them upward and onward till the final consummating victory was reached. They believed that God meant this nation to abide, to abide in unity, to abide in freedom, that it might carry the gospel

of salvation to the ends of the earth; and thus came unseen battalions of mighty power from the distant lands to which our missionaries had gone, and in which our missions had been established, to decide the fate of doubtful battles, to carry to victory the ensigns of the Republic. This is the temper of the nation; it is the indication within it, far-sighted and prophetic, of the Divine plan and purpose concerning it. And here is to be the glory of this nation. It is not in its history, it is not in its wealth, it is not in its vast commerce; the glory of this nation of which you and I are part is, and is to be more and more distinctly in all the future, in the work it does in furthering the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of transformation, until the ends of the earth shall have seen the salvation of our Lord. [Applause.]

And then fourthly, my friends, do not let us forget the final and the most important conviction of all, which is one that has been referred to here again and again in the course of these meetings — that the power, after all, by which we are to work in this effort to accomplish, as far as we may, God's purpose in the world, is the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not in the truths, stupendous as they are; it is not in the facts, transcendent as they are; it is not in the tender and terrible solemnity and pathos of the Cross of Christ, even; it is in the power of the Holy Ghost given unto us. For the Church in the world often simply reflects the temper of the world around it. As the waters reflect the blue of the sky above them, or the gold or crimson or black of the clouds, so the Church itself is continually reflecting more or less distinctly the temper of the world around it; and especially in times like ours, of vast secular ambition and extraordinary secular success. The temper of the Church becomes secularized too. In time of prosperity it is confident and boastful, perhaps, and feels that nothing can arrest it; in time of trouble, pecuniary or other, it is despondent, and feels that there is no use in further endeavor. Then quarrelsome divisions come in, as they come in the neighborhoods of the world, and the life and power of the Church fail because there is not this Divine energy within and beneath. It does seem to me, Brethren of the American Board and Christian

Friends, that we fail wholly to apprehend and appreciate the fact that in this tremendous parenthesis in history, between the ascension of the Master into the sky and his coming again in clouds and glory for the judgment of the world, the Divine agent for carrying forward the work of God on earth is the Holy Ghost; the Holy Ghost entering into the hearts of men; the Holy Ghost with his omnipotent and unsubduable power, silent and yet mighty. Men of the world are not indisposed to sniff at this, because they do not see the power. Well, we do not see the powers in the natural creation which work the greatest results. We do not see the power which binds the universe together. It is perfectly impalpable, though we are all within its grasp. We do not see the power in the vapor which revolutionizes civilization, tunnels the mountains, tramples the sea into a floor; we do not see the power in the type which the finger holds, and which dominates cathedrals; we do not see the power in the little spark which abolishes oceans and knits nations into neighborhood. All are silent unconspicuous powers, as is this power of the Holy Ghost; but what a power of transformation it is, in individual experience and in the history of communities! what a power to lift the race nearer the holiness of the throne of the Most High! It is the power necessary to generate and to maintain missionary enthusiasm. Missionary enthusiasm is not merely faith, confidence in God, confidence in his word; missionary enthusiasm is love for mankind, inspired by and touched with a Divine fire; and where this power of the Spirit of God is, there that missionary enthusiasm manifests itself in irresistible energy and efficacy. See it in the missionaries of the Middle Ages, to whom Dr. Smith referred yesterday in that remarkable paper, in Anskar and Benedict and all the others. You see it in the missionaries of our own time, and our own Board. I was very much touched the other day with the fact that a missionary woman, wife and mother in South Africa, out of her small savings had sent a gift to the American Board of $300 in gratitude for the commissioning of her third child to do missionary service in foreign lands! [Applause.] I put that to you, reluctant to give money, utterly

unwilling to give sons and daughters to this distant and dangerous service and work, and ask if there is not the power from the Spirit of God in that heart which you more vaguely, if at all, feel in yourselves. I remember that passing of the missionaries at Harpoot from a domicile that was already being shattered by shot to another where, for the time at least, they might have more security, men and women going together through the storm of bullets, carrying two who were too aged and infirm to walk themselves, and not a man nor a woman flinching or screaming as they moved along that path of death! That 's the power of missionary enthusiasm; that 's the tranquillity of the temper that is insphered in the heart of God; and when that power is among the churches, and in our hearts, then treasures are unlocked, then divisions are forbidden or are reconciled, and then is the energy of the Holy Ghost revealed; working through our small affairs to accomplish the sublime Divine design. Yes, the power of the Holy Ghost — that is the energy on which we must rely to carry forward this work of God to its triumphant and immortal success.

So, my dear friends and brethren, members of this Board, and Christian people interested in this work of missions, I bring to you these convictions, which, as I said, are not new, which were central in my heart and mind ten years ago when I faced you for the first time on the platform at Springfield, which have been only more and more thoroughly and vitally enthroned in my mind and heart from that day to this. Let us work along the lines, and on the levels, of these cardinal and superlative convictions: that God has a plan in history, that we may work with that plan, and be as sure as we are of God's character, as sure as we are of God's being, that ultimate success shall crown it; and let us work with the Gospel, the Gospel of life and salvation, which he has crowded and rammed with spiritual appeal to every soul of man. Let us work feeling that this is the opportunity of the ages, that this nation is the minister of God for the ages to come; by its position, by its power and resources, by its relation to other peoples, by its past history, it is the servant of God for furthering His divine designs on earth; and let us work always in the inspiration of that

Holy Ghost who separated Barnabas and Saul to the work of missions, who separated the medieval missionaries from all the quietness of monasteries and the seclusion and delight of libraries, to go out facing death that they might teach men of the Lord. Let us work under the power of that Spirit which we have seen in our own missionaries, felt in our own hearts — felt more than once, thank God, in these great assemblies; and let us do promptly what we have to do!

I look back to that evening at Springfield ten years ago, and of the one hundred and sixty-five members of the Board then present and voting, I think a full third have already passed away from life on the earth, among them some of the most eminent and distinguished: two secretaries, Dr. Clark and Dr. Alden; the honored and beloved treasurer, Mr. Ward; Ezra Farnsworth, at that time and for a long time a chief member of the Prudential Committee; many of the distinguished members, as I have said, of the Board, among them my own deeply loved and trusted friends, Dr. Dexter, Dr. Quint, Dr. William M. Taylor — whose name, as often as I utter it, brings a fresh throb to my heart. These were the three men who said to me: "You hesitate, you reluctate before this election; accept it and do your best," which I have tried to do. [Applause.] I remember, also, the others: President Porter, President Seelye, President Chapin, President Andrews, Dr. Eddy, Dr. Magoun, Dr. Patton, Dr. Harding, Dr. Atwood, my college classmate and lifelong friend, Dr. Robbins, my own pupil in the Gospel, Dr. Malcolm Dana — I cannot recall them all, these are examples; and my dear kinsman according to the flesh, my dear brother in the spirit and the life of the soul, at whose house I tarried then, to whose house the messengers of the Board came to notify me of my election, my dearly honored and beloved and trusted Dr. Eustis, of Springfield. I remember, too, the noble laymen who have been associated in the Board and who were there at that time, who have passed on: Mr. Battell, of this State; Mr. Monroe, of this State; Frederick Billings, Horace Fairbanks, Mr. James P. Wallace, of my own church; Mr. John N. Stickney, Mr. James White, Mr. Charles Theodore Russell,

Mr. Samuel D. Warren, Mr. Philip Moen — oh, I cannot begin to recite the names! you remember them. All these have gone on into the life beyond.

My dear Friends, let us work! It has been said to us here, again and again, in the course of this meeting, "Work while the day lasts, for the night cometh when no man can work." I certainly shall not dispute that word from the lips of the Master; but I will add, with the Apostle, work, and work with all your heart and with all your might, not only because the night cometh, for we are the children of light and the children of the day; we are not of night nor of darkness; therefore let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation, since the Lord hath not called us to death but to life, that we may live together with Him, whether we wake or sleep on the earth. I think of those who have gone on, not as buried in the dust of death, not as sleeping in the darkness and the silence; I think of them as ascending the starry steeps and standing before God, as hearing the Master's voice of welcome and acclaim, and joining in the worship of angels and of saints, their works following with them; and I pray God that you and I may be with them, and hear the same voice of welcome, when the shadows flee, and the darkness disperses, and the splendor of Immortality breaks upon our vision! [Applause.]

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